



DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

Fish and Wildlife Service

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SERVICE PROPOSES NEW PROCEDURES FOR SETTING OF DUCK HARVEST REGULATIONS

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, in cooperation with the four waterfowl flyway councils, is proposing to improve the way duck harvest regulations are set to provide more consistency, objectivity, and predictability to the process.

"In the past, hunters often have become confused by the complexity of the regulatory process, a lack of clearly stated harvest-management objectives, and an overly large number of regulatory options," said Service Director Mollie Beattie. "The new procedures will clarify the process and make it far more objective and predictable."

Under the proposed procedures, which are open to public comment, the number of regulatory options would be reduced to three "packages" or levels for the 1995-96 season--restrictive, moderate, or liberal.

The liberal option would be similar to the regulations issued for the 1979-84 seasons, the moderate option would be similar to the 1985-87 seasons, and the restrictive option would be similar to the 1988-93 seasons.

The option chosen for the 1995-96 season would be determined by a formula that weighs current resource status, including duck populations and habitat conditions as determined by the annual breeding duck survey, with desired harvest management objectives established by the Service in coordination with the flyway councils and the states.

The long-term recovery of waterfowl populations remains the Service's highest priority. Nevertheless, under anticipated conditions, the proposed procedures, as currently envisioned, would appear unlikely to lead to more restrictive regulations for the 1995-96 season. In fact, based on the results of a technical assessment of waterfowl harvests conducted by the Service, further easing of hunting restrictions, begun last season, may be possible without hindering long-term recovery.

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"As a state agency administrator, I fully support the proposed changes in the approach to establishing migratory bird hunting regulations," said Kenneth M. Babcock, assistant director of the Missouri Department of Conservation. "The new procedures utilize the vast amount of information we've gathered about harvest in the past to help us in the difficult job of managing duck populations. But more importantly, they set the stage to learn even more in the future, thereby providing more certainty, consistency, and predictability in harvest management."

As in the past, the Service's objective will be to maximize hunting opportunities, consistent with the long-term recovery of duck populations. Under the new procedures, this objective will be balanced with the waterfowl population and habitat goals identified in the North American Waterfowl Management Plan.

Hunting regulations would be least restrictive when duck populations meet or exceed the plan's objectives. However, depending on habitat conditions, the "liberal" option could still be chosen even if duck populations are below the plan's goals.

As a starting point for the discussion of the proposed procedures, the Service has suggested the objective of reaching a population of 8.1 million breeding mallards, as stipulated in the North American Plan.

This objective is simply a starting point for consideration. Flyway councils, states, hunters, conservation groups, and others will have ample opportunity to have their views heard on all aspects of the proposal during the public comment period and regulations-setting process.

One advantage of the proposed approach is that options for consideration would be established earlier in the regulatory process. This would give biologists more opportunity than they currently have to assess the impact of the various options on the waterfowl resource.

Experts disagree about the extent to which hunting has an impact on waterfowl populations. Over time, the new procedures will resolve this long-standing controversy by making more effective use of harvest and population data from current waterfowl monitoring programs.

"The proposal for the 1995-96 season represents a first step toward implementing the concept of adaptive harvest management, which, in the long term, will help us effectively manage this resource," said Paul Schmidt, chief of the Service's Migratory Bird Management Office.

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In addition, the simpler approach, with just three options, should reduce the confusion some hunters have experienced in the past as they have tried to keep track of minor year-to-year changes to the regulations.

"It is important that everyone involved in the process of setting these regulations--the flyway councils, the states, and the Service--have a clear concept of what options are on the table and the impact each will have on duck populations," Beattie said.

"At the same time," she said. "Hunters have a right to a clear idea of what the regulations for each season are and why they were adopted."

The proposed regulations will be published in the March 24, 1995, Federal Register. Public comments are requested and should be sent to the Chief (MBMO), U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 634 Arlington Square, U.S. Department of the Interior, 1849 C Street NW., Washington, DC 20240.



FISH & WILDLIFE SERVICE

Bulletin

U.S. Department of the Interior

Good News . . .

AMERICA'S NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGES

Hanging up the harness. They're hanging up the harnesses at **National Elk Refuge** for this season on the horse-drawn sleighs that take thousands of visitors to see the largest winter gathering of elk in North America. Patients and residents of a nearby hospital and nursing home also could keep an eye on the 10,000 elk through spotting scopes and binoculars donated by the refuge. Meanwhile, fly fishermen are gearing up to tackle the refuge's Flat Creek, considered to be one of the most challenging trout streams in the Rocky Mountain West. For more information, call **National Elk Refuge, Jackson Hole, WY, 307-733-9212.**

Help wanted: must have good attitude, enjoy life. Those are the primary "KSAs" (knowledge, skills, and abilities) required for volunteers at **Bosque del Apache National Wildlife Refuge**. "We look for people who enjoy working, for whom work is a hobby," says Refuge Manager Phil Norton, who supplements his staff with retirees who migrate from other climes to volunteer their services on the refuge. He provides RV hook-ups and utilities, and the volunteers park their RVs and live in their own little community. And he doesn't use them for "make work" projects: he has them operating heavy equipment, constructing buildings, grading roads, and working on legal issues like water rights. "They have talents I couldn't afford to buy," says Norton.

What do they get in return, besides the heartfelt thanks from the refuge staff? A sense of satisfaction, of giving something back to society and, of course, delightful weather and witnessing the world's largest concentration of greater sandhill cranes, 60,000 snow geese, and 25,000 ducks of 14 different species. **Bosque del Apache National Wildlife Refuge, Socorro, NM, 505-835-1828.**

Need college tuition? Check this out. Students from the New Orleans Youth Action Corps are earning college funds as well as a weekly stipend while restoring wildlife habitat on **Bayou Sauvage National Wildlife Refuge**, located within the city limits of New Orleans. Part of the Americorps Program, the students improved fishery habitat along with fishing opportunities by stemming wave erosion with 2,000 discarded Christmas trees. They've also planted 15 acres of cypress trees to encourage the return of bald

eagles when the trees are mature in 50 years; have pulled and cut down tallow trees, a pest tree that had invaded refuge wetlands; and will soon reclaim and rehabilitate an old roadside park that had become a dump before the refuge was established.

The enrollees also will help out on nearby Breton NWR, established in 1904 by President Teddy Roosevelt, where the nesting season is nearing for some 5,000 pairs of the endangered brown pelican and immense colonies of 50,000 to 75,000 terns. "I use these young people to extend my staff," says Refuge Manager Howard Poitevint. "With downsizing, they've been invaluable help." Bayou Sauvage National Wildlife Refuge, New Orleans, LA; 504-646-7555.

Happy birthday. America's National Wildlife Refuge System celebrates its 92nd birthday this month, still going strong as the world's most outstanding collection of lands and waters dedicated to wildlife. President Theodore Roosevelt started it all when he created the very first one, Pelican Island in Florida, on March 14, 1903. Since that time, the refuge system has grown in scope and diversity as well as size and number, with at least one refuge in every state and one within easy driving distance of most major metropolitan areas. Some 30 million people visit national wildlife refuges every year for wildlife observation, photography, education, to hunt or fish, or just to relax and enjoy nature. Others, more than 21,000 people of all ages and walks of life, make a real commitment by volunteering nearly a million hours each year, valued at \$8 million. **Thanks, America.**

Other Refuge Anniversaries. 90th: March 9, Stump Lake National Wildlife Refuge, North Dakota; 50th: March 30, Sutter NWR, California; 20th: March 24, Optima NWR, Oklahoma. Three refuges marked their 10th anniversary in February: February 5, Tensas River NWR, Louisiana; February 25, Stewart B. McKinney NWR, Connecticut; February 27, Buenos Aires NWR, Arizona.

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